

# Chapter 01: Origin and Development of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma

The period or Abhidharma represent a period in Buddhist philosophy and thoughts. During the first two centuries following the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, there was a move towards a comprehensive and precise systematization of the teachings. The philosophical systems that emerged from this refined analytical approach to the doctrines are collectively called the Abhidharma. Both the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda, the two major conservative schools had their own Abhidharma each based on a distinct Abhidharma Piṭaka. The Buddha laid down the foundations of the Abhidharma but it was actually compiled after the vinaya and sūtra. Its origin can be traced back to the sūtra style and have its origin in the discourses.

The whole period of Buddhism can be roughly divided into three main phases: Early Buddhism, Abhidharma, and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

## Early Buddhism

The Early Buddhism represents the Buddhist discourses delivered by the Buddha. Early Buddhism means Buddhism before the emergence of Sectarian Buddhism (Abhidharma). During the period of early Buddhism, there was no other Buddhist school, but only one Buddhist tradition. Even the word Buddhism is a later coinage; the actual word for Buddhism is Dharma.

In early Buddhism, there were only Dharma and Vinaya. Then, the Buddhist monks were called 'Samaṇa Sakya' 'a follower of the sage of the sākyas' (Śākyamuni).

There was only one doctrine, one Sangha (fraternity). Some modern scholars called it pre-canonical Buddhism. Pre-canonical Buddhism means Buddhism that existed before the compilation of the Pāli canon.

The Buddha himself has said that his teaching consists of two kinds of discourses: nītārtha and neyārtha. Nītārtha means those discourses whose meaning does not have to be drawn out; the meaning is clear, and not requiring any interpretation. Neyārtha means the meaning of the discourses has to be drawn out.

For example, the Buddha says there is no soul (anātman). But In the Bhārahāra Sūtra, the Buddha says that besides the five skandhas, there is a burden as well as a burden-bearer. "Burden-bearer" is like ātman (self). So we cannot understand that sūtra in the literal sense. It must be understood as nītārtha. The meaning must be clarified and interpreted. Some scholars do not understand the difference between nītārtha and neyārtha. What are the literary sources that we make use of to understand Early Buddhism? That is Sūtra Piṭaka which is separated into five nikāyas.

- Dīgha Nikāya: which contains the long discourses.
- Majjhima Nikāya: medium-length discourses.
- Saṃyutta Nikāya: a collection of discourses; anthology. Yutta means "put together". A properly organized collection of discourses.
- Aṅguttara Nikāya: 'aṅguttara' refers not to the content, but to text arrangement. Anguttara means that the discourses are arranged in ascending numerical order (1, 2, 3...)
- Khuddaka Nikāya: are small Nikāya.

As a Nikāya, the Khuddaka Nikāya is a much later text than the other four. But it contains some of the most ancient texts like the Suttanipata.

There has been a Sanskrit Sūtra Piṭaka, called Āgama:

Dīrgha Āgama,  
Majjhima Āgama,  
Saṃyukta Āgama,  
Ekottara Āgama (Aṅguttara is Pali term).

The Aṅguttara and Ekottara meaning is the same: numerically ascending order.

In Chinese, there is no Khuddaka Nikāya. There are only four Āgamas. That indicates that originally there were only four Nikāyas and the Khuddaka Nikāya is a later addition. The Pāli Nikāya and the Chinese Āgama are almost the same. That shows the antiquity of the Pāli Nikāyas.

We can say that the Sūtra Piṭaka is common to all schools of Buddhist thought because it was completed before Sectarian Buddhism. The Sūtra Piṭaka is commonly accepted by all schools of the Buddhist thought.

For example from the Pāli Abhidharma Piṭaka: Kathavatthu is a book in the Abhidharma Piṭaka. It was written at the Third Buddhist council, and it contains controversies between different schools of Buddhist thoughts. Kathavatthu is a series of debates, dialogues, within Buddhist schools on the controversy on dhammas. Usually the controversy is between the Theravādin and another school of Buddhist thought.

Up to now, we have defined one stage of Buddhist thought of Early Buddhism which represents the early phase of Buddhism before the rise of Buddhist schools (before the Second Buddhist council). Secondly, in order to understand early Buddhism, we go only to Sūtra Piṭaka. Sūtra Piṭaka represents the earlier stage in the history of Buddhist literature. Now, the Sūtra Piṭaka had been completely forgotten even in Burma and Sri Lanka because they follow the teachings based on commentaries/Abhidhamma, not based on Sūtra Piṭaka.

Buddhist books are written in Pāli, Prakrit, Sanskrit and mix-Sanskrit. Mix-Sanskrit is called Buddhist Sanskrit, the Hybrid Sanskrit. Now almost of Mahāyāna Sūtras are from Hybrid Sanskrit. Pāli, Prakrit, Sanskrit, mix-Sanskrit are used in India.

In the period of Abhidharma, new books were written. They are called Abhidharma books. Hundreds of books were compiled to explain the Sūtra Piṭaka. There are the commentaries, and also the sub-commentaries.

As a reaction against the Abhidharma, there arose a new school called Sautrāntika. Sautrāntika means those who consider the Sūtra Piṭaka to be the authority even though they did not totally reject the Abhidharma.

After the Muslims invasion of India, all the Buddhist books were lost, only a few books remain. Fortunately, most of the early Indian Buddhist books were translated into Chinese.

### **The Schools of Abhidharma**

The schools of Buddhist thoughts can again be divided into two main groups: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

Hīnayāna: Hīnayāna is a general term for the large number of Buddhist schools. According to the traditional account there have been eighteen Buddhist schools.

Modern researches have shown that there had been all thirty Buddhist schools which came under the term Hīnayāna.

What is the meaning of Hīnayāna? *Hīna* means low, inferior, base, despicable. Translation of small vehicle was wrong. If we take it as 'small vehicle', it might be termed as Cūlayāna. *Cūla* is contrasted with mahā. Hīnayāna is coined by the Mahayanist in order to despise the other schools.

About a 100 years that elapsed after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, important development took place within the Sangha – the first major schism took place where the Sangha was split into two groups, namely into Sthaviravāda and Mahāsaṅghika. According to the accounts of the schism presented in the Sri Lankan chronicles, the Dīpavaṃsa and Mahāvamsa, the version differs substantially from the Northern sources, Vasumitra's *Samayabhedoparacanacakra*. The schism in both these two lineages occurred during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century after the Buddha's parinibbāna.

The Sthaviravāda were later supposed to have split into 12 sub-groups as follows-

1. Sthaviravāda
2. Mahīṃsāsaka (Mahīśāsaka)
3. Vajjiputtaka (Vātsīputriya)
4. Dhammuttanya (Dharmottarīya)
5. Bhadrāyānika (Bhadrāyānīya)
6. Chandāgārika (Ṣaṇṇagarika)
7. Saṃmitīya (Sammattīya)
8. Sabbatthavāda (Sarvāstivāda)
9. Dhammaguttika (Dharmaguptaka)
10. Kassapiya (Kāśyapīya)
11. Saṃkantika (Saṃkrāntika)
12. Suttavāda (Sautrāntika)

The Mahāsaṅghika also split into a number of groups generally held at 6. These are as follows –

1. Mahāsaṅghika
2. Gokuhka (Kaukuṭika)
3. Ekavyohārika
4. Bahussutaka
5. Paññativāda
6. Cetiavāda

Of these total 18 schools, a majority did not flourish but went into oblivion. Among the Theravāda schools, the Sthaviravāda, Saṃmitīya, Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika became fairly prominent. It is seen that there were differences regarding doctrinal matters among the sects. For examples, almost all the Theravada schools other than the Sautrāntika developed their own scholastic tradition interpreting the Buddha's fundamental teachings giving rise to new ideas. There were much divergent views regarding the interpretation of fundamental concepts such as the nature of existence, rebirth, karma, perception, pudgalavāda by Pudgalavādins or Saṃmitīya and the tri-temporal existence of dharmas of the Sarvāstivāda.

As time pass by, many of these schools lost their vigor. The Sarvāstivādins rose to prominence under the patronage of King Kanishka. Infact, Sautrāntika and Sarvāstivādins led to further development of Buddhist thoughts by providing the

necessary background for the development of Madhyāmika which arose as a critique of the Sarvāstivādins doctrine of tri-temporal existence of all elements. The Sautrāntika theory of inferential perception provided the background for Yogācāra Idealism. However subsequently the major division of Buddhism boiled down to two and this is the division between Hīnayāna /Theravāda on one side and Mahāyāna on the other.

What is main difference between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna? One tend to look for the origin of Mahāyāna among the Mahāsaṅghika school as there are certain ideas which suggest that they are the precursor of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In religious matter, what the Mahayanist says there is only one salvation, that is, the attainment of Buddhahood. And one who aspires to become a Buddha is a Bodhisattva which came to be elevated as the spiritual goal. The Mahāsaṅghika made a very sharp distinction between the Arahant and the Buddha. They held that the Arahant could fall, but also held the view that it is relatively easy to become an Arahant and the attainment of Arahantship is not the final goal. This is the basic difference between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

What the Hīnayāna say is that you can attain enlightenment either by becoming a Buddha, or Pacceka-Buddha or Arahant. And the emphasis is more on Arahant. According to Mahāyāna, the attainment of Arahantship is an egocentric, and selfish kind of liberation because you work out your own individual liberation. That is the accusation. The attainment of Arahant is not selfish idea. It is by eliminating from selfishness that you become an Arahant. Therefore, it's hard to believe that the idea of Arahantship is a self-centered idea.

These are the two main basic groups: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna coming under the schools of Buddhism. From doctrinal the point of view we can classify all schools of Buddhist thought in India into three groups: Hīnayāna, Madhyamaka and Yogācāra.

Hīnayāna means the Ābhidharmikas, according to modern research there are thirty schools, because all Hīnayāna schools commonly had their own Abhidharma. There was only one school which rejected Abhidharma, and that is the Sautrāntika. The Sautrāntika Nikāya arose as a reaction against Abhidharma. The Sautrāntika says that the Abhidharma is not the word of the Buddha, not Buddhābhāsita, but the word of the disciples (Śrāvaka-bhāsita). Sautrāntikas are so-called because they accept only the authority of the Sūtra.

The Abhidharma is the later addition, and a later development. Generally speaking, except for the Sautrāntika, all of the Hīnayāna is an Abhidharmika, because every Hīnayāna Nikāya has its own Abhidharma. Then what is common to all Hīnayāna schools is that they accept Dharmavāda.

What is Dharmavāda? Dharma means the ultimate factor of existence. You analyze the individual and the world into the number of basic factors. These factors are called dharma. In other words, dharma means phenomena. If they are mental, they are called nama-dharma. If they are physical, they are called rūpa-dharma.

According to Abhidharma, the whole saṃsāric process can be explained in terms of nama and rūpa dharma. Everything in the universe can be explained with reference to these two categories whether animate or inanimate, living creatures, organic or un-organic, living or dead. Ultimately, anything can be analyzed into dharmas, that's why it is called Dharmavāda.

According to Abhidharma, the principal is the notion that all the phenomena of existence are made up of a number of elementary constituents, the ultimate realities behind the manifest phenomena. These elementary constituents, the building blocks of experience are therefore called dharmas. The dharma theory is not merely one

among others in the body of Abhidharma philosophy but the base upon which the entire system rests. It would be quite fitting to call this theory the cornerstone of the Abhidharma.

Dharmas are final factors, ultimate factors; that's why they are called Paramārtha. All dharmas are paramārtha, they are real in an ultimate sense. Everything is made up of dharmas, therefore everything can be reduced to dharmas.

Living being is only a concept, they don't have ultimately existence, when we call man, woman, God, deva, they are all concepts, as they don't have any real existence. What really exists is nothing other than dharmas. Things exist only by their concepts. Things like man, animal, and so on exist only by their concept, not in the ultimate sense, that is basic of Dharmavāda.

This so-called Dharmavādin is common to all Sectarian/Hīnayāna schools. There can be different version from the Dharmavāda, but the basic idea is the same. Dharmavāda is common to all Abhidharma schools, therefore, we can say all the Hīnayāna schools are Abhidharmikas, all the Abhidharmikas are Dharmavādas.

The dharma theory was not peculiar to any one school of Buddhism but penetrated all early schools, stimulating the growth of their different versions of the Abhidharma. The dharma theory was repeatedly enriched, first by Abhidharmika commentaries and later by exegetical literatures. The Theravada version receives less attention. The Sārvastivāda version of the theory, together with its critique by the Mādhyamika had been critically studied by a number of modern scholars.

Mādhyamika arose as a critical responds to Abhidharma. In their view, the dharma are not real nor ultimate. They are devoid of its own nature (svabhāva). None of these dharma have any essence, and in that sense, they are empty. Dharmas are dependent on each other.

The last stage of Buddhist thoughts is the Yogācāra. From the doctrinal point of view, they can be described as Vijñānavāda. Everything can be reduced to mind is Vijñānavāda. In the history of Buddhist thoughts, we can distinguish the three different stages. The first stage is represented by Dharmavāda, the Hīnayāna. The second is Śūnyatāvāda, that is Mādhyamika. The third is Vijñānavāda, and that is Yogācāra. These are three main stages in history of development of Buddhist thought in India. But outside India, Buddhism developed further in China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet.

Now, we have located the Abhidharma systematization in the history of the Buddhist thought. In our study of Abhidharma, we do not follow the traditional method of study of Abhidharma, because the traditional texts followed by Burma and Sri Lanka, it is assumed that there are only one Abhidhamma.

Abhidharma tradition is popular in Burma and Sri Lanka. Actually the study of Abhidharma is due to the Burmese influence in 19<sup>th</sup> century C.E. There are two things which came from Burma: Abhidhamma and Bhāvanā [meditation].

Actually the Pāli commentators were well aware of other Abhidhamma. Therefore, in the Pāli commentaries we find references to many other doctrines of Abhidharmas which had been criticized and rejected. According to traditions, the Abhidharma is the word of the Buddha, which again there is no historical evidence to prove that the Abhidharma is the word of the Buddha. If we follow the academic approach we must also understand that the Abhidharma is the result of gradual evolution in the history of Buddhist thoughts.

The beginning of the Abhidharma can be traced back to the discourses of Venerable Śāriputra, who was well known for having an analytic mind. Venerable Śāriputra was in the position to explain the implications of the Buddha's word, therefore, if we refer to two of his Sūtra, Dasuttara and Saṅgīti in Dīgha Nikāya, both delivered by Śāriputra, in these two Sūtra you find analytical method. It is said that Ven. Śāriputra led the way for the Abhidharma.

The question whether Abhidharma is the word of the Buddha or not is irrelevant from religious point of view, why? Because as long as the Abhidharma follows the early Buddhist doctrine, that is the word of the Buddha, there is no problem. Abhidharma is the result of attempt on explanation of the word of the Buddha by the Buddha's own disciples. It is commentary to the words of the Buddha. Abhidharma seems to unfold the implication of the words of the Buddha. So from the religious point of view that question does not arise.

There have been many Abhidharmas, but now we only have mainly two: Theravāda Abhidharma extant in Pāli and Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma extant in Chinese. Abhidharma Piṭaka on the Sarvāstivādin remains in Chinese including the commentary Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra.

### **History of the Sarvāstivāda**

Although it is difficult to speak of the exact date of the 'founding' of the Sarvāstivāda school, its presence, as well as that of its rival — the Vibhajjavāda lineage — in the time of Emperor Aśoka is beyond doubt. Since Aśoka's reign is around 268–232 C.E., this means that at least by the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E., it had already developed into a distinct school. Vasumitra's Samayabhedoparacanacakra, a Sarvāstivāda treatise, places the school's establishment at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century after the Buddha's demise.

The Sthaviravāda remained united for a certain period of time. At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, there arose some disputes, and it split into two schools:

1. the Sarvāstivāda, also called Hetuvāda (theory of causes);
2. the original Sthaviravāda which [then] changed its name to the Haimavāda (snowy mountain).

Emperor Aśoka's ascendance to the throne is established as around 270 century C.E. Accordingly, if we follow the Sarvāstivāda tradition itself which gives this date as 116 years (or a hundred odd years) after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, the date given by Samayabhedoparacanacakra for the establishment of Sarvāstivāda would be around the first part of 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. This tallies with the date of Kātyāniputra (ca. 150 C.E.) who is credited by tradition with the effective founding of the school. The earliest inscriptional evidence, however, was the Mathurā Lion Capital which dates from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. This inscription mentions the giving of alms and donation of monasteries by the wife of the mahāksatrapa Rājuvula to the Sarvāstivāda community. His son, Sodāsa, is also recorded as having given lands to two Sarvāstivādin monks, Arya Buddhadeva and Bhikṣu Buddhila. It appears that the Sarvāstivāda as well as its rival camp, the Vibhajjavāda, at first maintained its position as the orthodox Sthaviravāda. At this initial stage, the term 'Sarvāstivāda' was perhaps not specifically insisted upon.

The Sarvāstivāda remained the most powerful and influential school in north-western India from around the beginning of the Common Era to about the 7th century C.E., initially established in Mathurā and expanding in the north where Kasmira became its center of orthodoxy. With its highly developed abhidharma doctrines, it was the

leading Abhidharma school capable of repudiating the emerging Mahāyāna philosophy as well as the pro-Mahāyāna tenets upheld by other schools of Nikāya (i.e., non-Mahāyāna) Buddhism. Around the 6th or 7th century C.E., its leading position seemed to have been eventually replaced by the Saṃmitīya which had a well developed doctrine of karma.

By around the earlier part of the 2nd century C.E., the Sarvāstivādins seemed to have more or less determined what they considered to be distinctively orthodox Sarvāstivāda doctrines in contradistinction to the other contemporary schools. This is represented by the encyclopaedic compilation of the Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, the ‘Great Commentary’ by the Sarvāstivāda orthodoxy in Kasmira. Subsequently, however, within the broad Sarvāstivāda lineage itself, there still appeared to be disagreement concerning many of these doctrines.

### **Sarvāstivāda versus Vibhajyavāda**

In spite of various doctrinal disagreements — some of considerable importance — the various subgroups within the Sarvāstivāda school were united in their central tenet of Sarvāstivāda. It seems to have been a genuine belief on the part of the Sarvāstivāda that “sarvam asti” was what the Buddha Himself had taught. It became a problem — philosophically — only when they came to be questioned by their opponents as to the exact implication of their doctrine of sarvāstitva.

As noted above, even after they had eventually articulated this doctrinal position sufficiently to be established as a distinct school, they seemed to have continued to assume the position of the orthodox Sthaviravāda.

The working out of the implication of this thesis was still visible even as late as the time of Abhidharma-nyāyānusārā. The whole confrontation came to be zeroed in/focused on the dispute between Sarvāstivāda versus Vibhajyavāda. We are dealing here, in this context, with these two opposing theses and not with the issue of identification of the two broad sectarian lineages. As for the identity of the Vibhajyavādins in the Mahāvibhāṣā, Yin Shun has made an excellent investigation. According to him:

The Vibhajyavādins in the Mahāvibhāṣā were the continental schools generally referred to as the Vibhajyavāda comprising the Mahīśāsaka, the Dharmagupta, and the Kāśyapīya which prevailed in the Kasmira region, particularly with the Mahīśāsaka as the main stream.

In the Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya, the main opponents of the Sarvāstivādins, the Sautrāntikas, belonging to the Vibhajyavāda camp, propose that the Sarvāstivādin way of understanding sarvāstitva is not the only possible one. Indeed, they consider it to be a bad interpretation of the notion. For the Sautrāntikas, one could say ‘all exists’ only in the following manner: Past dharma-s have existed; future dharma-s will come into existence; present dharma-s are existing. Alternatively, one could also say ‘all exists’ in the sense in which the sūtra expresses itself: Everything that is within the range of perception — within the 12 āyatana-s (and nothing more) — can legitimately be said to exist.

In this work, the Sarvāstivāda is represented by Vasubandhu as defining their position as follows:

Those who hold 'all exists' — the past, the present and the future — belong to the Sarvāstivāda. Those, on the other hand, who hold that some exist, viz., the present and the past karma that has not given fruit but not those that have given fruit or the future, are followers of the Vibhajyavāda.

In Saṃghabhadra's Abhidharma-nyāyānusārā, a post Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya polemic in defense of the Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy, an additional requirement for the definition is noticeable:

It is only those who believe in the real existence of the three periods of time, as discussed above, as well as of the three kinds of the unconditioned, who can be considered as belonging to the Sarvāstivāda.

This same requirement is also found in the Abhidharmadīpa:

Sarvāstivāda is so called because it accepts [the reality of] the three periods of time, distinguished on account of activity, and the three reals [— the three unconditioned]...

The additional requirement seems to confirm our suggestion that even as late as the time of Abhidharma-nyāyānusārā, the orthodox Sarvāstivādins were still struggling to define themselves. According to the Samayabhedoparacanacakra, most of the early Buddhist sects had accepted the doctrine of sarvāstitva, even though they seem to have disputed endlessly on what it really meant for them in each case. It seems possible that even as late as the time of the Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya and Abhidharma-nyāyānusārā, there were still some Buddhists, both within and without the broad Sarvāstivāda lineage — including some sections of the Sautrāntika-Darśantika — who would accept the doctrine in a revised or different version from that adopted by the orthodox Vaibhāṣikas. It is perhaps because of this that Saṃghabhadra felt it necessary to dissociate the Vaibhāṣikas distinctly from the others whom he could not accept as real Sarvāstivādins in any sense.

In Abhidharma-nyāyānusārā, he names them as follows:

Pudgalavādins, called by him "the Superimposers or Additionists (Samāropavādins)" on account of their acceptance of the reality of the pudgala in addition to that of the dharma-s in the three times; Vibhajyavādins who accept the existence of only the present and the past karma that has not given fruit; Ksanikavādins who accept only the reality of the 12 āyatana-s of the present ksana; Prajñaptivādins who deny the reality of even the dharma-s of the present; Vaināsikas who hold that all dharma-s are without svabhāva, like empty flowers.

Sautrāntikas, here referred to as the Ksanikavādins, are singled out by Saṃghabhadra who denies that they qualify as Sarvāstivādins, for their view "differs from the Vaināsikas by just a mere ksana.

### **Proof of the thesis of sarvāstitva in the Vijñāna-kāya Śāstra, Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra and Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya**

Arguments in the Vijñāna-kāya Śāstra. The author establishes the thesis of tri-temporal existence on the basis of four fundamental principles commonly and tacitly assumed by the Abhidharmikas — partly on the authority of the sūtra-s and partly from among accepted abhidharma tenets:



- I. Two thoughts cannot be conascent, and a thought or thought concomitant cannot know itself. It is said in the sūtra that a person can observe the craving in his mind, etc. When one is making the observation, the observing thought and the craving (i.e., the thought having the craving) observed cannot be simultaneous, nor can the present thought know itself. The craving observed then must be either past or future. Hence past and future dharma-s must be existent.
- II. Karma and its retribution (vipāka) cannot be simultaneous; the fact that a karma which has become past can give rise to its retribution later proves the existence of the former as a past dharma, i.e., an existent in its past mode.
- III. The Buddha has taught that consciousness necessarily has an object (ālambana): since we can have consciousness of what is past and future, past and future dharma-s must be existent.
- IV. One can be endowed with (samanvāgata) dharma-s which do not arise presently: It is taught in the sūtra that someone in nirodhasamāpatti wherein no mental activity arises is still endowed with mental qualities such as moderateness in wishes (alpecchatā), shamefulness (lajjā), etc.; likewise, a trainee is still endowed with the five spiritual faculties — faith, vigor, etc. — even when he has an enwrapped or defiled mind. Accordingly, those which are not present but can still be possessed must be existing as past or future dharma.

### **Arguments in the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra**

The arguments for the tri-temporal existence of dharma-s are put forth to refute “those who are deluded with regard to the intrinsic nature of the three times (adhvan) — denying the past and the future, and holding that what exists in the present are the unconditioned dharma-s”.

The first argument employs the Sarvāstivāda notion of endowment (samanavāgama), a notion that suggests some doctrinal development:

One is ‘endowed’ with a dharma when one, having acquired it, continues to possess it. When a dharma has not been acquired and one continues in the state of not possessing it, there is the ‘non-endowment’ of this dharma. For the Sarvāstivāda, this human experience presupposes the existence of past and future dharma-s. The other arguments employ systematic logical disputation coupled with an appeal to scriptural authority.

- a. If past and future are non-existent, there would not be endowment and non-endowment of these dharma-s, just as there is no endowment and non-endowment of a second head, a third hand, etc., which are non-existent. Since there are in fact the endowment and non-endowment, it is known that past and future are existent.
- b. The person who denies the past and the future must say in which temporal period the fruit of a present retribution-cause exists — past, present or future. If he says “past”, then the past exists; if he says “future”, then the future exists; if he says “present”, then it amounts to the proposition that a retribution cause and its fruit exist simultaneously, which contradicts scriptural statements.

If he says “Its fruit is not within the three periods of time”, then he is proposing that there is no fruit, since a retribution fruit is not unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*). And if there is no fruit, then there would be no cause either.

Likewise, if the retribution fruit exists in the present, then he must say in which temporal period that corresponding cause occurs — past, present or future. If he says “past”, then the past exists; if he says “future”, then the future exists; if he says “present”, then it amounts to the proposition that a retribution cause and its fruit exist simultaneously, which contradicts scriptural statements. If he says “Its cause is not within the three periods of time”, then he is proposing that there is no cause, since a retribution cause is not unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*). And if there is no cause, then there would be no fruit either.

- c. If the past and the future were non-existent, then there would not be the facts of ‘leaving home’ (*pravrajyā*) and receiving ‘higher ordination’, in accordance with the stanza below:

If one holds that the past does not exist, there would not be past Buddhas. If there were no past Buddhas, there would not be Leaving Home and receiving Higher Ordination.

- d. If the past and the future were non-existent, then it must be that Sangha members practice false speech while possessing proper knowledge, in accordance with the stanza below:

If [a Sangha member] holds that the past is non-existent and yet speaks of his [ordination] age, He would be increasing, day by day, [both] his proper knowledge and false speech.

- e. The non-existence of the past and future implies that the present likewise does not exist, since the present is designated in relation to the past and future. The three times not existing, the conditioned would not exist. The conditioned not existing, the unconditioned too would not exist since the latter is established in relation to the former. The conditioned and the unconditioned both not existing, then there would not be any dharma whatsoever, which entails that there is no liberation and *nirvāṇa* — a serious false view!

### **Arguments in the Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya**

The argument put forth by the Sarvāstivāda in the Abhidharma-kośabhāṣya, by way of both scriptural authority (*āgama* — *a.* and *b.*) and logical reasoning (*yukti* — *c.* and *d.*), are essentially similar:

- a. For, it has been said by the Buddha: “O bhikhu-s, if past *rūpa* did not exist, the learned noble disciple could not have become disgusted with regard to the past *rūpa*. It is because past *rūpa* exists that the learned noble disciple becomes disgusted with regard to the past *rūpa*.

If future *rūpa* did not exist, the learned noble disciple could not have become free from delight with regard to the future *rūpa*. It is because future *rūpa* exists that...”

- b. It has been said by the Buddha, “Conditioned by the two [— sense organ and the object —], there is the arising of consciousness...”

- c. Consciousness arises when there is an object, not when there is no object. This is a fixed principle. If past and future [dharma-s] were non-existent, there would be a consciousness having a non-existent object. Hence, in the absence of an object, consciousness itself would not exist.
- d. If past [dharma-s] were non-existent, how could there be in the future the fruit of pure or impure karma? For it is not the case that at the time of the arising of the fruit a present retribution-cause exists!

### **Sautrāntika critique of the epistemological argument**

The logical argument for the two requisites for the arising of consciousness — object and sense faculty — is in conformity with what the Vaibhāṣikas cites in *b.* as the scriptural authority. The Vaibhāṣikas insists on these twofold requisites. Accordingly, if past and future dharma-s are nonexistent, then mental consciousness of them would not arise, since one of the requisites (object) is lacking. But this contradicts experience: We do have cognition (buddhi) of them, which proves that they are real.

The Sautrāntika does not accept that a buddhi must have a corresponding existent object. For him, objects of cognition can be either existent or non-existent. But even when an object is non-existent, the principle (niyama) of the two requisites is not violated. Sthavira Srilata, a prominent Sautrāntika leader in Saṃghabhadra's time, explains:

This follows in accordance with the principle of inferring from a succession of causes and effects. How? It is after having grasped a present [object] that [the mind] can swiftly infer to and fro: It can infer that such and such an effect is produced by a past cause of such and such a kind. This cause in turn arose from such and such a cause, and so on, correspondingly up to the remote [past]. It is completely from a process of inference that one has the vivid perception [of a past object] as if it were present. Or, [the mind] infers that such and such a kind of cause in the present moment can produce such and such a kind of effect in the future. This effect in turn will induce the arising of such and such an effect, [in this way] correspondingly up to the remote [future]. Although at this stage the object does not exist, it does not mean that the jñāna is without the two requisites... This is because causes and conditions exist in the particular series, at the time when a particular knowledge qua cause (hetu-jñāna) arises. That is: In the past there arose such a jñāna; through a causal transmission, a jñāna having such and such a form is produced in the present moment. Since the present jñāna has the past jñāna as its cause, this present jñāna arises with an understanding that is like the previous one, having the very past object (visaya) as its present ālambana.

However, that ālambana does not exist now. Yet, although non-existent now, it nevertheless serves as the ālambana. Hence one cannot say such a cognition is devoid of the two requisites. The Sautrāntika explains that he does not in fact object to the proposition of 'all exist' (Sarvam asti), provided it is properly understood in accordance with the sūtra statement:

O Brahmins, 'all exist' means no more than the 12 āyatana.

Or rather, one should say: past is that which was existent; future is which, given its cause, will exist – past and future will exist in this sense, not in the sense that the present dharma-s exist as real entities. This amounts to defining the characteristic of the existent as having arisen and not yet ceased. Saṃghabhadra objects to such a

notion which for him amounts to the priori assumption that the past and the future do not exist. Their proposition is invalid, for what has arisen and not yet ceased is just another name for the present.